

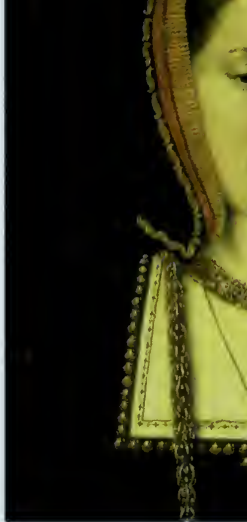
*Catherine of Aragon to
Henry VIII of England*

January, 1536

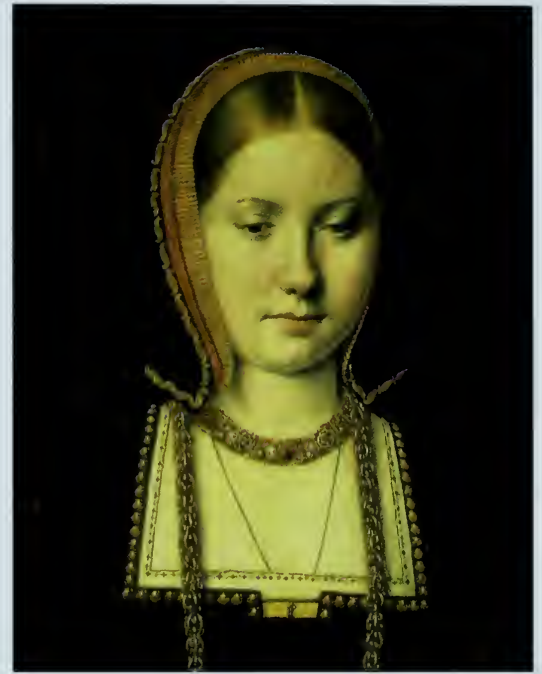
My most dear lord, king and husband,

The hour of my death now approaching, I cannot choose but out of the love I bear you, advise you of your soul's health, which you ought to prefer before all considerations of the world or flesh whatsoever. For which yet you have cast me into many calamities, and your self into many troubles. But I forgive you all; and pray God to do so likewise. For the rest, I commend unto you Mary, our daughter, beseeching you to be a good father to her, as I have heretofore desired. I must entreat you also, to respect my maids, and give them in marriage, which is not much, they being but three; and to all my other servants a year's pay, besides their due, lest otherwise they should be unprovided for; lastly, I make this vow, that mine eyes desire you above all things.

Farewell.



Above A portrait of Isabella of Aragon, painted (unknown). She was married Henry, at age 16.



Above A portrait of the young Catherine of Aragon, painted by M. Sittou (date unknown). She was 23 years old when she married Henry, at age 17, on June 11, 1509.

690 Polyd. Verg. Ang. hist. lib. XXVII.

690 Polyd. Verg. Ang. hist. lib. XXX.

milias diminueret, exterorumque sacerdotum opes extenuare, uti ne luxuries inde erumperet magis. Quapropter posteaquam ad ea omnia corroboranda ac confirmanda usum est satis prouisum esse, leges late sunt, penitus multo grauissimae constitutae illis, qui seiscient contra atque leges ipsae laxissimae, aut uerbo discōue aliter ac liceret, acta edictaque concilij improbassent. Ceterum ad Catherinam Bedfordiensem, ad uillam reum à uiro factum, se consulit in comitatum minus salubrem, ubi uera pagiam, quam appellant Kymbalton, locum degebat sanctam. Post uero animi morore, timentia misisset armata, uitam degebat sanctam. Post uero animi morore, confecta, cum cepit arotare, Henricus statim auidiuit, cum Eustachio Cappucio diligenter atque uel celeriter officium fecit. At Catherina sexto post die grauiori morbo affecta, cum animo praestiteret mortem aduentare, unam ad regem, alteras ad Eustachium, quas ipsa dictauit, in haec uerba:

Domine mi rex marite semper charissime, saluē iam aduenit hora mortis. Quod temporis puncto, amor facit ut te paucis admoneam de rebus, quas tuam debui curare, propter quam & me in multas miseria periculis exposcisti: sed hoc tibi ignosce, ac Domine mi rex, quod officium illud

Right The letter (second paragraph) as it appeared in Latin in a medieval history book of 1555, *Anglicae Historiae*, by Polydorus Vergilius.

Handwritten: *Handwritten signature*

and since

Weak and approaching death, Catherine of Aragon, the Spanish princess and former wife of Henry VIII, dictated her last letter to him. She began with a wifely admonition, and ended with a loving plea to see him again,

"mine eyes desire you above all things."

A few hours later she died, according to her chaplain still asking God's pardon for,

"the king her husband, for the wrong he had done her."

Catherine was the youngest daughter of the powerful Spanish rulers, Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, and had an important part to play in Spanish policy. Catherine was to cement an alliance with England by marrying the heir to the throne, Prince Arthur, the elder son of Henry VII. On October 2, 1501, she landed at Plymouth in England, and married Arthur a month later—he was 14 and she 16. Within six months Arthur lay dead in Ludlow Castle, the victim of an epidemic.

Henry VII was reluctant to lose the alliance with Spain and determined not to return Catherine's dowry, so it was decided that she should marry Prince Henry, Arthur's younger brother. He was only 11 years old, and 14 was the minimum legal age for marriage, so Catherine waited, at the mercy of the gossip-ridden English court, while European politics shifted behind the scenes. Through her years of widowhood Prince Henry was one of Catherine's few regular visitors and a genuine affection grew up between them. As Henry VII began to regret the promised marriage and seek other allies, his son began to desire the match for love, not for political advantage. By the time the prince was 17, the couple were still not married. Then, in 1509, just as Catherine was making preparations to return to Spain, the old king died, and young Henry ascended the throne. Exercising his new authority, he married Catherine almost immediately.

"If I were still free, I would choose her for my wife before all others,"

wrote Henry VIII to his father-in-law, Ferdinand.

Early in 1510, Catherine's first pregnancy ended, as did so many in the Tudor age, with a stillborn baby. On January 1, 1511, she gave birth to a baby

boy, who died seven weeks later. This pattern repeated itself; in spite of Catherine's many pregnancies, only one child, Mary, survived. The lack of an heir was a constant anxiety, but in all other respects the king and queen seemed an ideal and loving couple. Visiting the English court in 1520, Erasmus wrote:

"What family of citizens offers so clear an example of strict and harmonious wedlock?"

Then in the spring of 1526 Henry became infatuated with Anne Boleyn, one of Catherine's ladies-in-waiting. He had had affairs before, but Anne resisted



Above Henry VIII, by Hans Holbein the Younger, c. 1538. Henry was extremely vain about his appearance, and asked the artist to make a particular feature of his shapely legs.



Above A writing desk belonging to Henry VIII, decorated with his own portrait and heraldic badges (the portcullis and the tudor rose) and those of Catherine (the pomegranate and the fleur-de-lys).

Henry's advances, insisting on marriage first. Henry had needed the pope's dispensation to marry Catherine, since marriage to a brother's widow was forbidden without special permission. Now Henry argued that his expedient marriage to Catherine had broken God's law. He feared—or said he feared—that he had been punished by God for this transgression through the death of his male children. Through long hours of cross-examination Catherine defended her status, emphasizing her devotion and loyalty,

"I love and have loved my lord the king as much as any woman can love a man, but I would not have borne him company as his wife one moment against the voice of my conscience."

While the pope delayed in Rome, Henry subdued objections in parliament and the English church. However, he seemed reluctant to say anything that attacked Catherine personally. Throughout the legal battles he praised the queen as a lady,

"against whom no word could be spoken."

He continued,

"If it be adjudged that the Queen is my lawful wife, nothing will be more pleasant or more acceptable to me....If I were to marry again, I would choose her above all women."

If, however, the marriage were ruled unlawful,

"...then shall I sorrow, parting from so good a lady and loving companion."



On July 11, 1531, Henry rode out from Windsor to go hunting—Catherine never saw him again. Satisfied with the decisions he had forced from the church in England, Henry married Anne Boleyn in secret. She was crowned queen with full public splendor on June 1, 1533, when she was already six months pregnant. Henry believed that God showed approval through the pregnancy, and confidently expected a son, but Anne gave birth to a baby girl, the future Elizabeth I. Henry was devastated, and a worse blow was to follow. In March 1534, the pope declared Catherine's marriage with Henry still valid. He had left himself no choice but to reject the pope's authority. English statesmen and clerics who refused to accept reform were executed. Catherine, though spared execution, was cut off from all but a few loyal friends and servants. She died on January 7, 1536.

A few months later, Anne was executed for adultery. Within 24 hours, Henry married his third wife, Jane Seymour. His 22-year marriage to Catherine had been based on loyalty and affection. The rapid succession of marriages that followed (divorced, beheaded, died, divorced, beheaded, survived) suggested that Henry never found that stability again.

Below A section of the Westminster Tournament Roll, showing celebrations for the birth of a son to Catherine and Henry in 1511. The queen is in the center of the grandstand, while the king waits to joust. The death of the prince was a fatal blow to the marriage.



Above Henry's unsuccessful petition to the pope, dated 1530, asking for the annulment of his marriage to Catherine. His case was supported by the English bishops who signed in agreement.

• The Lovers •

CATHERINE OF ARAGON
(1485–1536)

was the youngest daughter of the Spanish monarchs Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile. From an early age she was destined to strengthen Spain's alliance with England by marrying the heir to the throne. Widowed by Prince Arthur after only six months, she later married his younger brother, Henry, in what was both a political and a love match. Though she was a firm favorite with the English people, her reign as queen was blighted by Henry VIII's anxiety over the succession to the throne. Although the couple had one surviving female child, all their male offspring died in infancy. Catherine was a devout Catholic and relied on the pope to protect her position, but in his anxiety to produce a son Henry renounced the Catholic Church by divorcing her in a dramatic battle of Church and State that ushered in the English Reformation.

HENRY VIII OF ENGLAND
(1491–1547)

was one of the most powerful of England's kings. He ascended the throne in 1509 and consolidated power in both Church and State in his own person, renouncing papal supremacy, proclaiming himself head of the church, and dissolving the monasteries. He is at least as well remembered for his succession of wives, six in all. The first, Catherine of Aragon, he divorced. The second, Anne Boleyn, he had beheaded for adultery. Jane Seymour, his third wife, died in childbirth in 1537. Anne of Cleves he divorced, and the fifth wife, Catherine Howard, he had beheaded in 1542. The following year he married Catherine Parr, who outlived him. Henry fathered three English sovereigns, the boy-king Edward VI, Mary I (known as "Bloody Mary"), and Elizabeth I. His reign radically reshaped English society and established Protestantism as the state religion.